

Fig. 1. Map showing the recorded localities of *Rhinoceros unicornis* (●) and the distribution of grassland (▨).

January, 1995. A lone rhino travelled through Narayanpur area of Lakhimpur district of Assam to Drupong RF of Papum Pare district, Arunachal Pradesh. In all probability it was from Kaziranga National Park, as every year a few from this national park wander up to Narayanpur area. It stayed in Drupong RF and adjacent areas of Torajuli (near Assam-Arunachal Pradesh border) for a week (mostly in the valley of the Pichola river). However, it fell to poachers near Narayanpur while coming back.

The above records suggest that the *Rhinoceros unicornis* sporadically wanders into Arunachal Pradesh although none of the recorded areas are

suitable habitat for the species. The only large patch of grassland in Arunachal Pradesh is found near the confluence of the Siang, Lohit and the Dihing rivers covering parts of D'Ering Wildlife Sanctuary, Dibang RF and adjacent riverine areas (about 220 sq km) but there is no evidence of any recent occurrence of the rhino from these areas.

October 22, 1996

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12. A BAT EATING COMMUNITY OF CHHATARPUR DISTRICT OF MADHYA PRADESH

(With one plate)

During the Parliamentary election 1993 I was posted to village Patha of Damoh district as presiding officer. One of my polling officers K.C. Ahirwal,

Asst. Veterinary Field officer, told me about the killing (he termed it suicide) of "birds" in the forests, near Bakswaha in District Chhatarpur during winter

on some particular days from Dussehra to full moon of Kartick by the local people who eat them and extract oil for use against rheumatic and other pains. I decided to investigate this strange behaviour which could be similar to the bird deaths at Jatinga of Assam. I could not survey the area during the year but I kept in touch with Ahirwal who promised to join me the next year.

The next winter, a few days prior to Deepawali in November I met Ahirwal in his village Imalai for the exact location of the area. He introduced me to Mr. Mohammad Salim, Deputy Ranger of Forest of Kumharai (Hatta) who was also aware of the phenomenon. He informed me that the people of Durgwan village in district Chhatarpur trapped these "birds" in the forest in thousands from caves by covering the cave entrance at night with blankets. They sometimes ate them raw and also extracted oil which is useful against rheumatic and other joint pains.

On 10th November, 1994 we both started at 0730 hrs from our place and reached Durgwan (approx. 24° 20' N and 79° 40' E and 83 km away from Damoh) at 1115 hrs. The forest Chowki was on the road and we met and discussed our quest with the forest officials. According to them this phenomenon was an ancient practice and the local people, mainly Saur tribe, trap the Chempla (a local name for bat) like birds during the night on these days by covering the openings of various caves with blankets. Sometimes they trapped more than a thousand "birds". Some of them eat the "birds" without cooking. However, others extract oil from them in frying pans. I showed them the BOOK OF INDIAN BIRDS (Ali, 1979). Most of them pointed to the Palm Swift and gave slight differences, but nobody said that it was a bat.

Before leaving the place we were able to collect some of the oil from a local. I went through the few available books and journals but could not trace the presence of Swiftlets in this region.

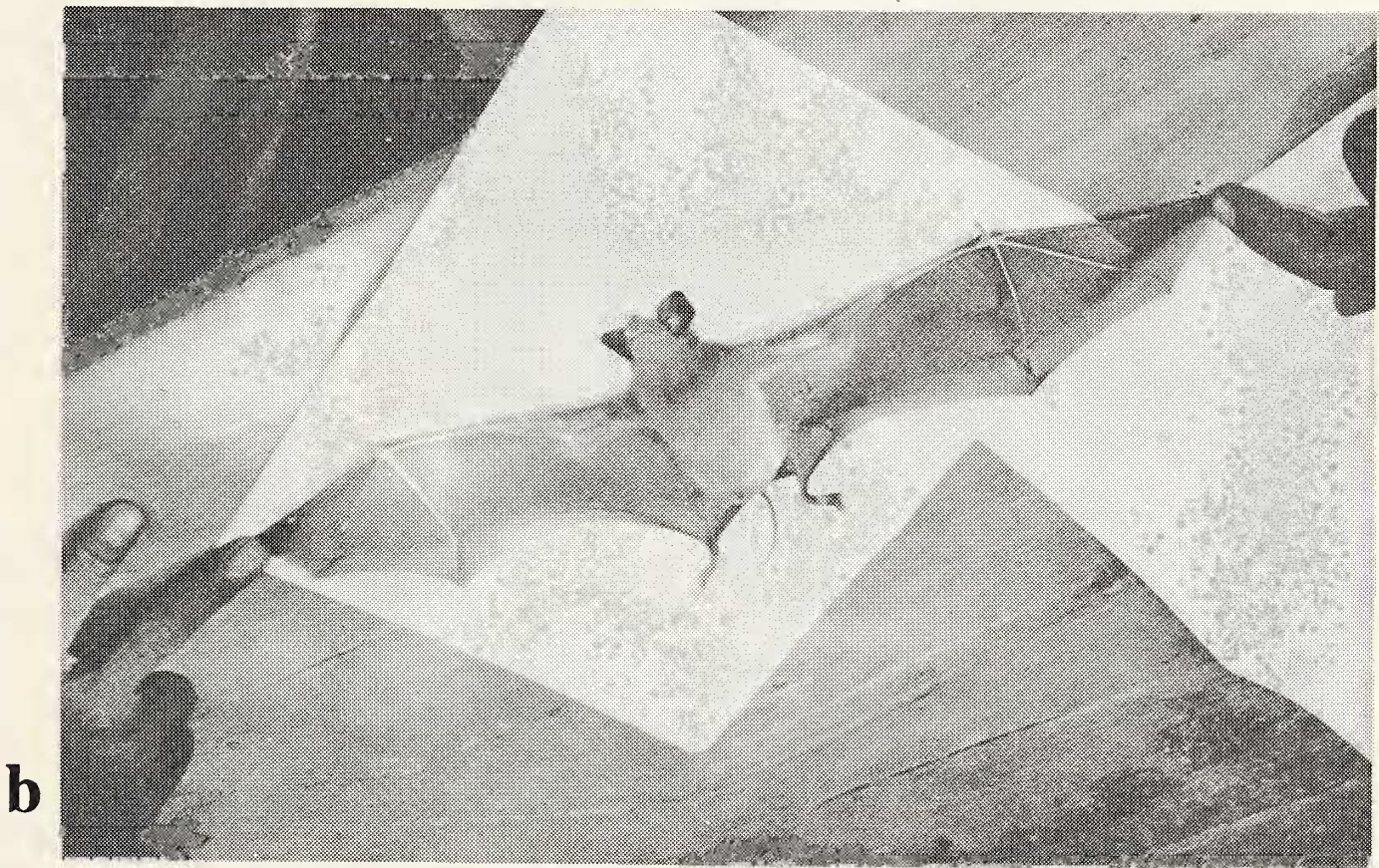
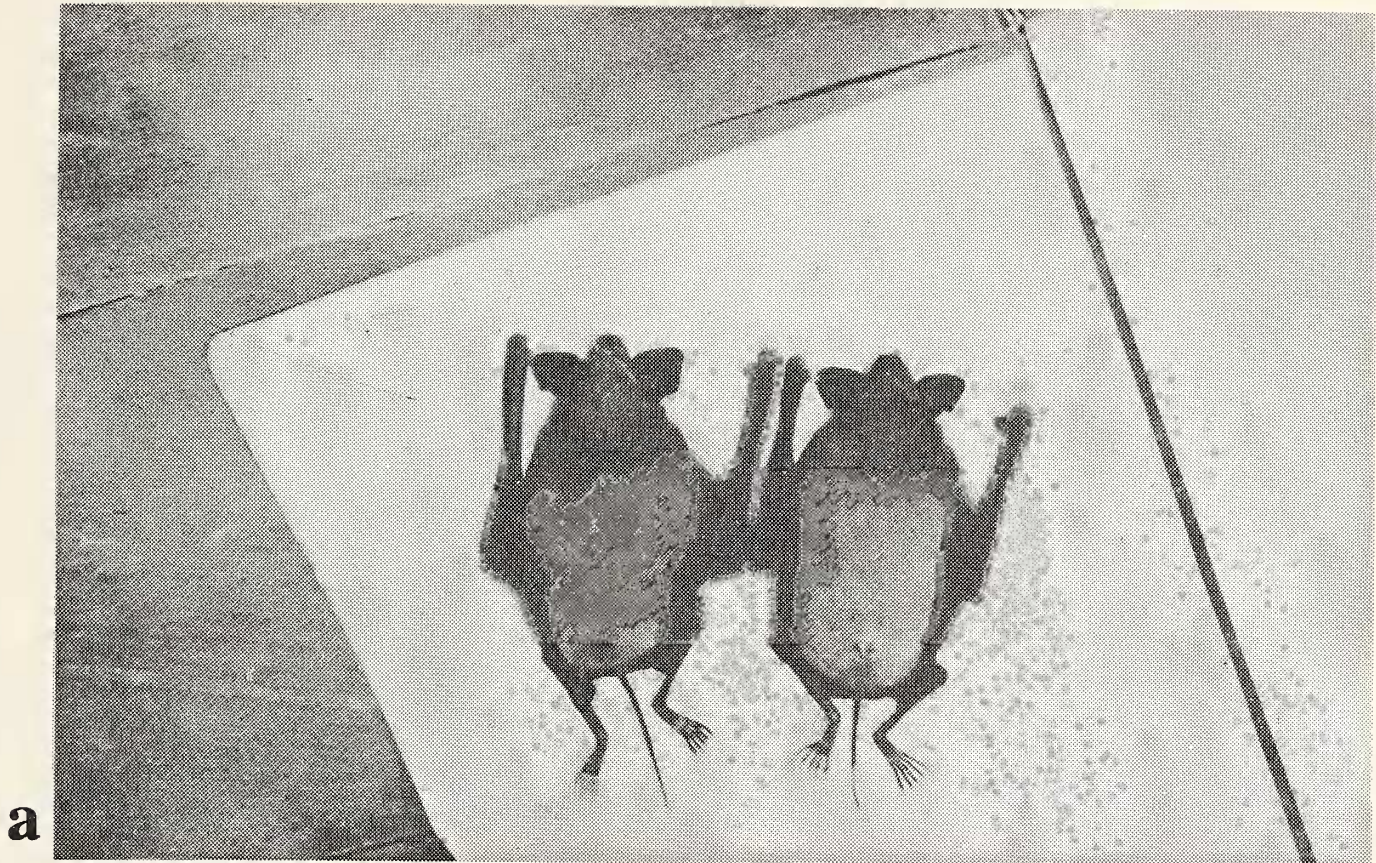
Next year on 30th October, 1995 we again reached Durgwan and the forest guard sent a local man to one of the trappers' houses. Soon that man brought a pair of the so-called "birds". We were

surprised to see a pair of bats with a mouse-like free tail which we had never seen before. I took some measurements and interviewed some local people including the Saur tribals and took several photographs of the bats and of the whole team including some Saur. Further enquiries revealed that:

1. The trapping of bats is a continuing practice from very early times during Dussehra to the Kartick fullmoon.
2. There are 30 to 40 and 8 to 10 houses of Saur tribals in Durgwan and Surajpura Roads respectively. Prior to trapping, the oldest man of the tribe used to worship their God (Badai-Baba). Strangely, among the puja material Ganja (*Cannabis sativa*) is a must.
3. The tribe traps the bats in the night using blankets at the entrance of various caves, probably they know about the vision system of bats and kill them one by one in large numbers during one operation.
4. The event of trapping/use of oil attracts, local and nearby people everyday who also participate in large numbers.
5. For the extraction of oil, they stretch out the skin and wings of the bats and put them into hot frying pans. After filtering the crude oil, the remaining parts are eaten.
6. These bats are probably resident to this region as they are also seen by local people in pre- and post-trapping periods.

After getting back to Damoh, I identified the bats with the help of the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society (1993, 1994) and Encyclopedia of the Animal World (1972). The bats are commonly known as Lesser Mouse tailed bats *Rhinopoma* which due to (i) Smaller free rat-like tail (3.7-4.2 cm) in comparison to head and body length (9.4-10 cm) (ii) naked face, ear and connective membrane (iii) Small, triangular dermal ridge (iv) tragus in the ear, should be *Rhinopoma microphyllum*

In my view this old traditional phenomenon is not harmful for the bat species and the ecosystem if it is continued, limited to Saur tribe only, but its increasing popularity and the involvement of other



a. Ventral view of a pair of Lesser Mouse tailed bats.
b. Fully stretched ventral view of Lesser Mouse tailed bat.